



Essential Christian Doctrine



Some things you will learn in this session....

- Why Christianity is unique among all the world religions.
- How the Bible compares to other religious writings.
- What other religious groups say about Jesus.
- How to recognize the counterfeit claims of cults.

Outline

Essential Christian Doctrine

1. The standard
 - a. General revelation (nature)
 - Psalm 19
 - Romans 1:20
 - b. Special revelation (Scripture)
 - 2 Peter 1:21
 - 2 Timothy 3:16
2. Heresy and orthodoxy
 - a. Heresy
 - b. Orthodoxy
3. Four universal creeds
 - a. Apostles' Creed
 - b. Nicene Creed
 - c. Athanasian Creed

d. Definition of Chalcedon

4. A dozen essential doctrines

a. God's unity

- Deuteronomy 6:4
- 1 Corinthians 8:5–6

b. The Trinity

- 2 Thessalonians 1:2
- John 1:1
- Matthew 28:19

c. Human depravity

- Romans 3:9–20
- John 3:3

d. The virgin birth

- Luke 1:34–35, Matthew 1:18

e. The sinlessness of Christ

- Hebrews 4:15
- 1 Peter 2:22
- 2 Corinthians 5:21

- f. Christ's deity...
- g. ...and Christ's humanity
 - John 1:14
 - Hebrews 1:1–8
 - Galatians 4:4–5
 - 1 John 4:2–3
- h. God's grace
 - Romans 5:10
 - Titus 3:5
- i. Faith
 - Ephesians 2:8–9
- j. Christ's atoning death
 - Romans 3:25–26
- k. Jesus' bodily resurrection
 - 1 Corinthians 15:1–6
- l. Christ's second coming
 - Acts 1:11
 - Revelation 1:7

Key Terms

Confession (from Latin *confiteri*, “acknowledge”) Like creeds, confessions are an active acknowledgement of the church’s faith and teachings. “Confessions of faith” often include both creedal declarations and statements summarizing the distinctive teachings of a particular denomination or group of believers.

Creed (from Latin *credo*, “I believe”) A simple summary of beliefs. Creeds are easy to memorize and flexible to teach.

Doctrine (from Latin *doctrina*, “teaching,” “learning”) A belief that a group holds as true. Christian doctrines organize and explain the beliefs the church learns from the Bible.

Heresy (from Greek *haireisis*, “choice,” “faction”) A teaching that contradicts another teaching that has been accepted as the norm; the opposite of orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy (from Greek *ortho*, “straight,” and *doxa*, “belief, opinion”) The opposite of heresy. Irenaeus (AD 130–200) used the word orthodox to characterize his own teachings, with which most other Church Fathers agreed, and the word heresy to define those of his adversaries. When Orthodox is capitalized (as in Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox) it refers to the church bodies of Eastern Europe and the Middle East that divided from the churches aligned with Rome in the Great Schism of AD 1054.

Talk About It

Discussion Questions

1. Which essential doctrines do you think are easiest for people to accept? Which ones are most difficult? Why?
2. Which essential doctrines do you notice cults denying or distorting most often?
3. How does understanding the “bad news” of human depravity help us appreciate the “good news” of Jesus Christ?
4. What is the significance of Jesus’ bodily resurrection?
5. If someone were to ask you, “What is grace?” what would you say?

Get Into God's Word

Key Bible Verses

Read John 1:1–14.

Q Jesus Christ is referred to in this passage as “the Word.” What does this passage reveal about who Jesus Christ was and is?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–6

Q In your own words, what is the “gospel” that the apostle Paul is reminding his readers of in this passage?

Test Your Knowledge

Quick Quiz

1. The creeds help believers to:
 - a. Recognize heresy.
 - b. Distinguish essentials from nonessentials.
 - c. Express the faith clearly.
 - d. (a) and (b)
 - e. All of the above.

2. True or False? Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, taught that sin, sickness, and death are unreal.

3. The Bible is:
 - a. Divinely inspired.
 - b. Preserved by God.
 - c. A collection of opinions.
 - d. (a) and (b)
 - e. All of the above

4. True or False? Mormonism teaches that God has always been God.

5. The Bible teaches in Ephesians 2:8–9 that it is by _____ through faith that we are saved—and that is not from ourselves.

(Answers in Leader Guide)

Think About It

Personal Reflection

1. Choose one (or two or more!) of the key Bible verses or any of the Scripture references mentioned in this session to memorize. Memorizing Bible verses will not only be personally edifying, but will be useful to recall on-the-spot when you are in conversation with someone in a cult or another religion.

2. Read the creeds. You can find the texts of the four ecumenical (universal) creeds, as well as various denominational statements of belief, at www.creeds.net. Ask yourself, What does the creed explain about God? How can I use this teaching to discern the truth?

Where Did the Creeds Come From?

THE APOSTLES' CREED

The apostles did not write the Apostles' Creed. No one knows for certain when this creed was written. References to and quotation of similar statements—known as the “Rule of Faith”—can be found in writings as early as the second century AD. The name “Apostles' Creed” means that the creed contains the Apostolic tradition. The Apostles' Creed is the most universal of all the creeds. Most Christian denominations continue to recite and teach it.

THE NICENE CREED

The greatest doctrinal challenge to the church arose internally. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, suggested that if God begat Jesus, then Jesus had an origin. As such, Jesus did not share in the same divine essence with the Father—making him a lesser god. This teaching became known as Arianism. In AD 325, Constantine called the leaders of the church to participate in a council—that is, an assembly of bishops. They met in the city of Nicaea, in present-day Turkey. The Council of Nicaea, made up of about 300 participants, overwhelmingly voted against the Arian teachings—ancient documents suggest that only three bishops refused to sign their agreement. The council expressed its views about God, Jesus, and the church in the Nicene Creed.

ATHANASIAN CREED

Athanasius was one of the most active opponents of Arius' teachings. His persistence and clear mind helped the church to clarify its positions and write it in a creed, the Nicene Creed. Athanasius' teachings are summarized in the Athanasian Creed. While it is likely that Athanasius did not write it, the creed contains his teachings and main ideas. The Athanasian Creed begins by affirming, “This is what the catholic [or universal] faith teaches: we worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity. We distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance [or essence].” After unpacking these ideas, the creed concludes, “So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.”

DEFINITION OF CHALCEDON

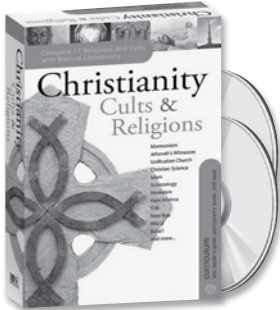
Understanding the incarnation of Jesus—the embodiment of God the Son in human flesh—was one of the greatest challenges for the early church. In AD 451 the Council of Chalcedon (located in today’s Turkey) provided a clear statement of the Apostolic teachings concerning Jesus. The Definition of Chalcedon made it clear that Jesus is fully God and fully human, two natures existing in perfect harmony in one person.

(Adapted from *Creeks & Heresies: Then & Now* Rose Publishing, www.rose-publishing.com)

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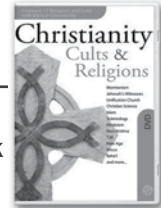
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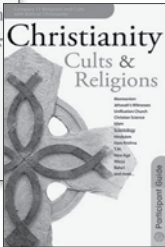
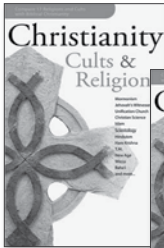
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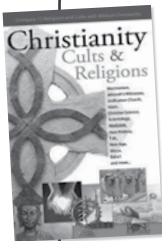


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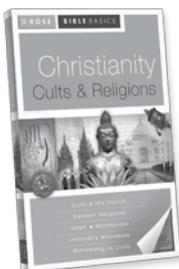
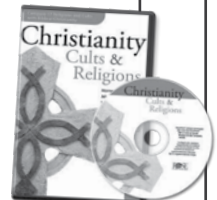
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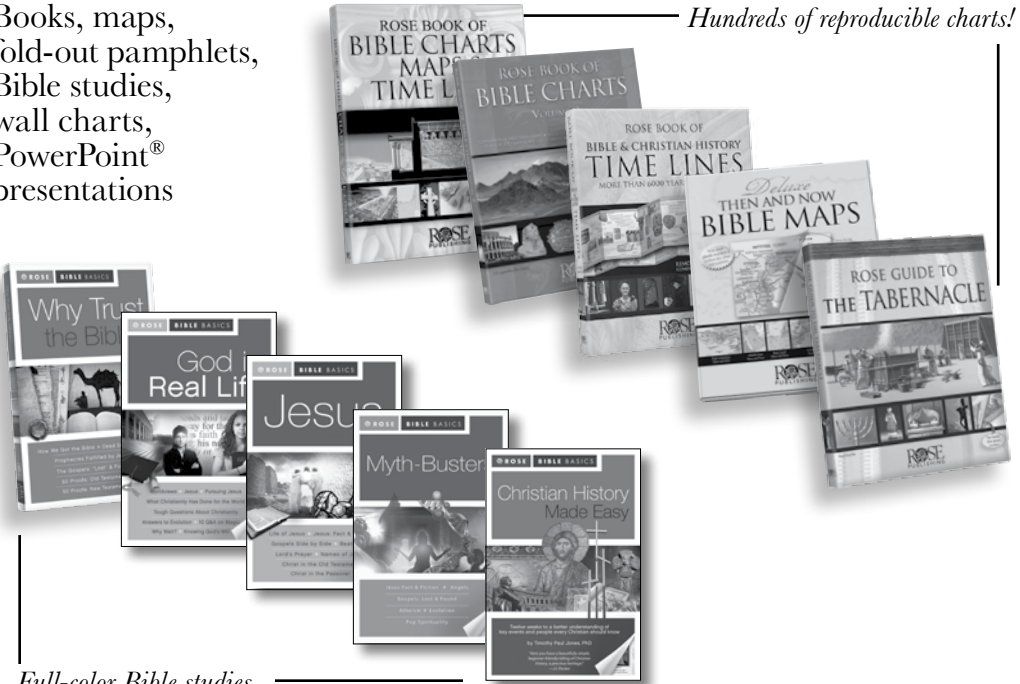
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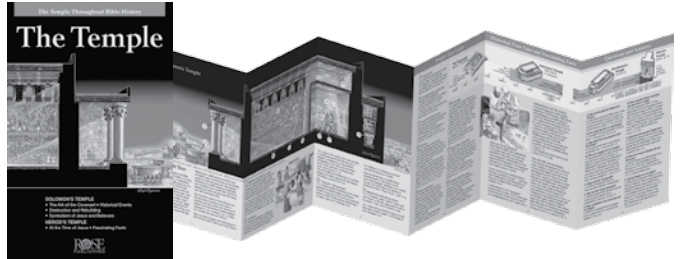
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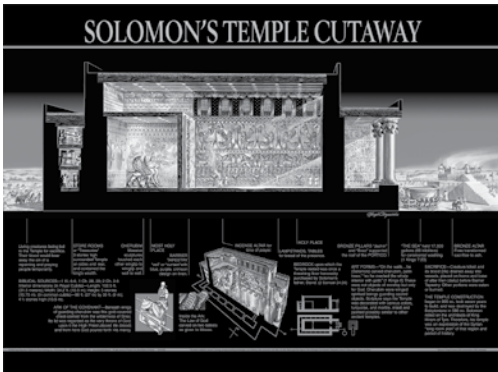


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